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Exploration and Discovery

THE ISAIAH INSCRIPTION

In the year 1889 Conrad Schick found in the village of Silwan at Jerusalem a group of four rock-hewn chapels, and gave a description of them, with his usual accurate plans, in the *Quarterly Statement* of the Palestine Exploration Fund for January, 1890 (pp. 16-18).

The largest of these rooms is about nine feet wide by fifteen feet long, and has an apse about seven feet wide by four deep. The benches of rock on the sides led Schick to regard them as originally tombs of Jewish construction, afterward used as Christian chapels. He refers to the statement in Matt. 23:29 and Luke 11:47, "Ye build the tombs of the prophets," because he found on the wall of the apse an inscription of which he gave a representation by means of a squeeze. It was not Schick's habit to give translations of inscriptions, and he sent to London only the copy, which is sure to have been made with great care.

The editor of the *Quarterly* simply remarked of it that the chapel "appears to have been dedicated to the memory of the prophet Isaiah."¹

In the *Quarterly* of the same year, for July, Flinders Petrie told of a visit made by him to the place, which had been sold by its owner to the Franciscans, who had renewed its use as a chapel. He found Schick's copy of the inscription "not quite correct," and gave his own reading, but attempted no translation.²

In the October issue of the same year C. R. Conder mentioned the notice of Isaiah's tomb by the Bordeaux Pilgrim, but it is indefinite.³ Justin Martyr speaks of the death of Isaiah by being sawn asunder⁴ and a mulberry tree, said to mark the place of his martyrdom, is shown south of the old Pool of Siloam.

As to the inscription first copied by Schick, no one seems to have translated it. The researches of Clermont-Ganneau in Silwan were earlier, in 1873-74, and he did not see it. He did, however, advise "future archaeologists" to examine this ancient necropolis, "perhaps the most ancient of all those of Jerusalem."⁵

¹ *Quarterly Statement*, 1890, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

³ *Pilgrims' Text*, Vol. I, p. 24.

⁴ *Dialogue*, chap. 120; so *Ascension of Isaiah*, chap. v.

⁵ *Archaeological Researches*, Vol. I, p. 319.

In examining the inscription as given by Schick and Petrie we observe slight, yet important, differences. Schick has short marks before K, after H, and after Φ, which Petrie did not get because he took no squeeze. Evidently a letter is missing from the last word, and Schick's mark there may be a part of the needed H. This word, apparently in the genitive, implies that we should so understand the proper name which precedes it, and which represents the Latin rather than the Hebrew or Greek form of the name, unless we find it in the rabbinic shortened form, *ישעיה*.

ΚΤΥΤΗ,ΤΕΡΩΙ,ΑΙΑ
ΠΡΟΦ,ΤΟΝ

SCHICK'S TRANSCRIPTION

ΚΤΥΤΗΤΕΡΩΙ,ΑΙΑ
ΠΡΟΦ ΤΟΝ

PETRIE'S TRANSCRIPTION

Continuing backward, we next note the disguised form of *ἱερος*, "holy," or more probably *ἱερον*, "chapel or shrine." The sign *Τ* would then appear to be a crasis for *τε* and *ι*, and we may understand "and shrine."

We are now at the beginning, and meet with the combination of letters which has made the inscription hitherto unreadable. Here we observe that Schick found a mark before the K, and that the second T of Petrie is with Schick a different sign. The top of this indicates *π*, and the small side mark may be a part of it. As to the first mark, it can not be *ι*, for that would not make sense. Any other letter preceding that is not likely to have been overlooked. If it is an imperfect letter like the mark after Φ, it may represent *ε*, which would give the word *εκτηπη*, with one mark after H not accounted for, unless we take it as iota subscript and take both words as in the dative, expressing the idea of dedication or the purpose of the builder. In this reading it is interesting to note that the squeeze taken by Schick is the nearer to a perfect copy, and that every small mark, disregarded by Petrie, is needed.

The meaning would then be: "For the bas-relief and shrine of Isaiah the prophet."

In this connection it is interesting to note the use in Matt. 23:29 of the word *κοσμεω*, "to garnish" or "adorn." In the case of a rock-hewn tomb this would evidently mean to carve out columns or other ornaments. Light-foot⁶ points out that a portion of the temple-offerings was devoted to building the tombs of the prophets. Schick's plan shows a small niche just at the center of the wall of the apse, and over this is the inscription, showing that the niche had been cut for the figure in relief and the shrine of the prophet Isaiah.

If these suggestions are not reasonable, their publication may call out better ones.

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⁶ *Horae Hebraicae, ad loc.*